



Lights Up by AHardLifee, writeyourownlifestory

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Summary:

Puff piece writer Richie Tozier is given the chance of a lifetime to interview his celebrity crush: Dr. K, the lead singer of punk rock band, Trashmouth. Dr. K is about to release his first solo album and Richie wants to get all the dirty details. But all is not what it appears to be and the two realize they know each other from a different time, in a different place, when they were both very different people.

1. Cruel To Be Kind - Nick Lowe

Author's Note:

Please enjoy this beginning of a very wild ride.



*Oh I can't take another heartache
Though you say you're my friend, I'm at my wit's end
You say your love is bonafide, but that don't coincide
With the things that you do
And when I ask you to be nice, you say*

*You've gotta be cruel to be kind, in the right measure
Cruel to be kind, it's a very good sign
Cruel to be kind, means that I love you, baby
(You've gotta be cruel)
You gotta be cruel to be kind*

Richie Tozier didn't know what he wanted to do with his life.

That wasn't a very unique statement but Richie wasn't a very unique person. An average guy who was as blind as a bat, born in bumblefuck nowhere and eventually making it out of there and into the big wild city, making a living working at a big-name magazine.

Okay, the last part was pretty impressive, but he didn't actually work very hard for that job.

He used to dream of writing comedy. Of telling jokes or writing for amazing shows like Saturday Night Live or something on Comedy Central. He wanted to be a comedian. To make people laugh. Sure, he is seen as the funny guy around the watering tank, but that's just because the rest of the people he worked with were a bunch of yuppies with impressive college degrees and no real personalities. They're no better than the robots who work for BuzzFeed.

They had paperback covers and an app for people who didn't want to go to the store to buy an actual copy. They had their own YouTube channel that hit millions of hits thanks to interviews and other shit that Richie took part in.

When Bill decided he wanted to make this into a real thing, he wanted it to make some sense. It wasn't some balls to the ball insanity mag that people read for juicy gossip. It was real. The people who subscribed were real and the people featured in it were real.

Richie's writing, not so much.

He mostly did puff pieces. Little things that didn't take a lot of effort but were mostly filler in between the larger stories. It was something Bill had done for them after the magazine got big. You see, he and Bill had been buddies in college. Both young and naive about the world. Neither really knew what they wanted, but they had dreams and that was all that mattered back then.

It was Bill that had the real talent with writing and despite publishers being interested, he never took into account just how much time, effort, and money went into getting a book published. Richie, always believing in his best friend, decided to give him all the cash he had saved up for spring break so he would make the first move on getting his novel out.

He didn't mind much as he found that he could eat, sleep, and drink on the couch the same way he could out on the beach.

That novel ended up being a best seller and skyrocketed Bill's career. Bill always remembered that, so when his second and third books became such a thrill, he decided to take the chance and create a magazine and brought Richie along for the ride.

It was easy work and he made good money for doing very little, but he found that was the main cause of his quarter-life crisis. He wanted so much more than he had been given that Richie was actually feeling guilty for wanting more.

He had done stand up in the city and even took an improv class, but nothing seemed to stick to him. Now he was over thirty and found himself in a rut. He lived alone in a small apartment filled with things he didn't need but purchased because he thought they would bring out a sense of excitement.

He was single, though that was a whole nother issue as it took Richie an embarrassingly long time to come to terms with his own sexuality. Growing up in a small town where people were cruel and the world didn't understand left marks on an impressionable kid. It wasn't until he was halfway through college that he did anything with a guy and well-passed gradation that he realized that it was more than okay to be gay, it was normal.

So yeah, he was open and fine with it, but still lonely as hell. He had been with people in the past, but he found that he mostly just shut himself off from the world. He wasn't happy about anything anymore and it seemed the only thing that got him by was that ending it all would have proved his teenage bullies right; that he was better off dead.

And if there was anything Richie wanted to live for, it was spite.

And also music.

Despite not being musically inclined at all, Richie loved music with all his heart. He spent a good portion of his time listening to records as a kid. He used to go around carrying a walkman and CD player and Zune throughout his life. He paid for the mom's gigs on his phone because he needed to have all his favorite songs ready to blast at the tap of a finger.

While they already had a guy that wrote specifically about music for the magazine, he had always been able to sweet talk Bill into allowing him to have a few moments to shine and write something about some artist. Those were the pieces that really mattered to him.

The ones that gave Richie the chance to dive deep into the thing he loved.

Sure, he had written a whole expose on Street Fighter and perhaps he did make a big deal out of the Star Wars franchise, but it was the moments when Richie could reel back and listen before writing that got him going.

They rarely did full-length articles on performers as the magazine was something of a clusterfuck of topics. Bill Denbrough never wanted to settle on just one thing. Paper Boat was more than just one specific topic. It was everything and they would be damned if they ever settled on its something.

But of course, now and then something would come along and the whole team would be scrambling to put together a magazine dedicated to that one specific person. It wasn't always a celebrity. Bill meant what he said when he wanted to keep the magazine aimed at the everyday people.

Their biggest seller to date had been when they put out issues all about Ben Hanscom the architect. Richie had no idea why anybody would want to read about the guy other than to enjoy the pictures that were taken of him, but low and behold, the world wanted to know.

As it turned out, Ben was a decent human being who just wanted to make the world a better place and he also happened to be extremely hot while doing it. Who knew that was possible!

The physical copies sold out everywhere and the website crashed thanks to all the promotions they did on it. Like, what the actual fuck?

Bill was that good at what he did and it also helped that he was writing his books on the side. He had people from all over coming through wanting to see what they could do and it only proved to be more impressive as time went on.

Now the magazine needed something new, something fresh and it seemed Bill had it all planned out.

“Here at Paper Boat, we don’t choose a good looking celebrity because we want to make money. You know, I’m not going to call up Jennifer Aniston and ask her to do me a favor -- I could, but I won’t -- because that isn’t what we do here.” Bill explained as they went over the board meeting for the next issue. “The people featured on our cover are interesting. People who want to bring the world together and make a change. Or maybe they’re just batshit insane and look good while doing it. Who knows.”

A small array of laughter came over the place. Richie leaned back in his chair, half paying attention. He knew how these things went. Bill made a big, exciting speech before revealing who or what they’d be focusing on. The assignments would be passed around and Richie would be given something soft and fun.

He got the dumb shit that got the people who didn’t want to read involved. Sometimes he’d do interviews while vlogging. They’d try food they never tried before or do something stupid. One of the most interesting had been when he got assigned to interview Kristen Wiig while bobbing for apples. Certainly interesting and the flow to the

website was wonderful.

Richie was the writer they went to when they wanted it to seem kitsch and gimmicky. Enough for it to garner actual attention, but nothing worth anybody's time.

He tossed his stress ball up in the air, catching it as it followed the natural path and came back down. He got bored easily as meetings like this and he waited for Bill to just get on with it and assign everybody their respected jobs.

Bill hit a button on his computer, revealing a picture that Richie was all too familiar with. It was of a punk rock band that he had followed since he graduated from college. Trashmouth was one of the greatest bands that had ever come into Richie's life. They were like if Queen and the Ramones were put together, had a baby, and then that baby had a baby with Green Day: that weirdly insane combination would be Trashmouth.

There were five members, but the main focus was and always had been the lead singer and guitarist Dr. K. Nobody knew why he went by that nor did he ever give an answer. Richie had googled him a couple of times, wanting to find out more, but the guy was a fucking mystery. It was like he just appeared on the scene, completely out of his mind with cut off sleeves and steller vocals.

It was safe to say Richie had a big gay crush on Dr. K.

And that was fine because Dr. K was just as gay.

He had never been seen with anybody, always choosing to keep his personal life private, but his songs were obvious enough even if most of them seemed pretty genderless. He had done one interview where the person asking the questions kept using the term 'she' or 'her' until finally, the guy replied that he writes songs about guys.

That took the world by fucking storm and Richie Tozier had never been the same.

"Some of you may be familiar with Trashmouth. Multiple Grammy noms and wins. Always in the top 40 listings despite repeatedly being told that punk rock was dead."

"Please tell me we're going to be featuring the band," Mike, the music specialist for the magazine, piped up eagerly.

"I can't because we won't," Bill replied. "Our focus is on him." Bill hit another button and a solo picture of Dr. K popped up.

Richie's mouth was watering and he sat up straight. He had the same picture in a small poster in his apartment. It was set up alongside some other pictures in what he called his "Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Wall" because he was just that big of a fan. He looked at it often, always finding himself thankful for all the music that had been created and got him through some pretty dark days as a kid.

Did it also help that Dr. K was incredibly attractive and gave Richie a little bit of encouragement just by looking so good? Yes, yes it did.

“It seems Dr. K will be going off on his own. My sources tell me he’ll be putting out a solo album by the end of the year and I want to know everything about it. Mikey, that’s your job. Speak to whoever you have to to find out what is going to be on that album. Audra, speak to the rest of the band, find out how they feel about the ending of an era. Georgie, get your camera ready because we’re doing a photo shoot with him in three days.”

“Who is doing the main expose?” Greta asked, popping her gum as she spoke.

Bill smirked, turning back to his computer. “I’ll pick someone later. For now, you’re all dismissed.”

The group got up from their chairs and left Bill’s office. All except for Richie, who was too fucking flabbergasted to do a damn thing. As Bill began to head out, he finally scrambled to his feet to follow him. His long legs led him there quickly, though he mostly sidestepped around his coworkers to finally reach their boss.

“Bill! Big Bill! Wait up.” He called, following him to the elevator.

“What’s up, Rich? I’m about to head out for lunch.” Bill said, turning to face him. “You hungry? We could check out that new sandwich place that opened across the way.

“Oh, no. I’m time. Stuffed.” Richie patted his stomach lamely, offering a large smile to his friend and boss. “Hey! So, just checking

in to see about that latest pitch.”

“Oh right,” Bill paused, hitting the elevator button. “You were a fan of that band, right? Oof. Sorry about the breakup buddy. Haven’t you seen them like six times?”

“It’s sixteen, but that’s not important right now.” Richie corrected. “Bill. Buddy. You have to listen to me.”

“You got it, Rich.”

“I know you only trust me with the puff pieces because I’m not as talented as Mike or even Greta, but I need you to trust me on this.”

“You can do the expose, Rich.”

“I have gotten better over time and I swear, if you just give me the chance, I promise. I won’t do a single embarrassing voice or anything to get Paper Boat blacklisted.”

“I’m sure you’ll embarrass yourself in one way or another, but that’s your issue. You have two days.”

“Until what?”

“Until your interview with Dr. K,” Bill said, stepping into the elevator as the doors opened. “If you’d stopped rambling you would have heard me tell you that you’re going to be the one doing the expose. You’ll be meeting him in two days, so you better come up with some good questions.”

“Holy shit,” Richie muttered.

“Holy shit, indeed Tozier,” Bill smirked. “I know you’ve been in some sort of funk lately, so I hope that this will shake you up a bit. Better keep your fanboy boner under control.” Bill warned, smiling as the elevator doors closed between them.

Whether Richie realized it or not, Bill believed in him and his writing ability. He may not have the raw talent like himself, but he knew what Richie was capable of. He has a way with people that allowed them to loosen up and relax and nothing was better for a good interview than someone comfortable with the person asking the questions.

Bill couldn’t think of a single person who would be better for this specific project and having Richie be an uber-fan of the artist was just a bonus. If Richie made an ass of himself, that would be his problem, not the magazines.

Richie stood there, not knowing what to do next. He looked to his watch, realizing he had less than 72 hours to come up with a buttload of questions for his idol. He ran back to his cubby to brainstorm.

2. So Hot You're Hurting My Feelings - Caroline Polachek

Notes for the Chapter:

Dr. K is ready to see Richie now...

*I get a little lonely
Get a little more close to me
You're the only one who knows me, babe
So hot, you're hurtin' my feelings (woo)
Can't deal*

Richie had very little idea what he was supposed to be doing.

Okay, correction, he had a decent idea. It was a simple interview. Ask a couple of questions, hopefully, get a couple of answers. It wasn't being filmed nor were they doing something dumb to pass the time. Just a simple sit down with a punk rock legend in the making.

Richie had written down almost a hundred questions, half of which he wanted to scrape because they just seemed so generic and boring. This might have been just a stereotypical interview but the person of interest was anything but typical.

Dr. K had changed things for the better in the music industry. He didn't stick to social norms, but he also didn't jam his uniqueness down your throat. If you wanted to see him, you would see him. If you didn't want to pay him any mind, that was fine too. Dr. K had said on more than one occasion that he wasn't there to entertain the small minds of the world. The people who would see him would see him and those who heard him would listen.

Richie listened very clearly. Almost nightly. He wasn't lying when he told Bill he had seen them sixteen times in the past eight years. From small dingy bars deep in the city to the biggest venues the state had to offer. Richie had been there for it all, cheering on this amazing band and buying up their merch to boot.

Richie thought about wearing one of their shirts, but he didn't want to come on too strong. He stuck with his regular business attire, making sure that nothing was too wrinkled or had a strange mess to it.

He thought about doing something with his hair until he finally snapped himself out of this little fantasy he had going on inside his head. This wasn't a blind date; wasn't some matchmaking at the hands of Bill. This was a serious business and Richie had to take it seriously.

Richie was gangly, with wavy hair and thick glasses. Sure, some guys found him to be cute, but he gave credit to his charming personality. He put on a mask to get by but in reality, he was just a lonely guy who didn't know where he belonged.

So when the day came, he told himself just to relax because nothing would come from this. There wasn't going to be a magical spark between the two. He wasn't going to let go of his career and start touring with Dr. K as his personal assistant slash roadie slash groupie.

He was just a guy interviewing for his place of work and Richie reminded himself that repeatedly as he arrived at the location Bill

gave him. Red Balloon records were serious business that only took on the best of the best. Richie gave his name and flashed the pass that he always kept on him from Paper Boats just to show he was legit.

He was sent up automatically and was practically buzzing in the elevator up. When he arrived at the top, a red-headed woman greeted him, offering a polite smile as they walked through the hall. She was dressed smartly in a suit of her own, high up against her neck and tight at the waist. She offered a quick handshake before they got moving.

“Beverly Marsh. You’re a little early, but that’s all right. K likes punctual people.” She revealed.

“Figured it would be better to be early than late.”

“Better late than never as they say,” Beverly commented with a knowing smile. “I hope you have something good to ask him.”

“Way to put the pressure on,” Richie muttered, following close behind her. “I tried to choose questions he hadn’t already been asked before, but there are only so many non-generic questions out there. I’m sure he’ll be asked the same bullshit by the other magazines.”

“Dr. K isn’t doing any other magazine interviews. He’s agreed to only speak to a Paper Boat representative. You, specifically.”

“What? You’re kidding.” It wasn’t unheard of for a celeb to only speak to one news outlet, but for him to choose to only speak to PB when he had so much to release seemed a bit out there. Richie wondered if Bill had worked his magic on Dr. K’s people and convinced them to sell the story to Paper Boat and only Paper Boat.

“You’ll be the only so I certainly hope you make it worth his while.”

“No pressure there,” Richie muttered, adjusting his glasses nervously.

“Don’t be worried. Dr. K is very easy going. Just don’t make this into a big deal.”

Richie snorted, giving the redhead a quick side look. “Right. Speaking to a premature rock God. It’s no big deal.”

Beverly chuckled, stopping outside one of the doors. “He isn’t a God. He’s just a guy with a lot of talent.”

“Here I thought the lead singer of a punk rock band would want to surround himself with people who stroke his ego.”

Beverly shrugged, reaching for the doorknob. “He’s not the lead singer of a band anymore. And K doesn’t surround himself with anybody he doesn’t want around. Constantly hearing how wonderful you are can be pretty boring, don’t you think?” Opening the door, Beverly gesturing inside. “He’ll be with you in just a moment.”

The room was empty but set up comfortably. There was a small bar with drinks and a table of snacks set up. Caramel popcorn and peanut M&Ms filled up the bowls. Richie grabbed a couple of candies, tossing them in the air and catching them. He walked around, admiring the room. It had that vintage rock and roll vibe to it. Vinyl along the brick walls and posters of all the bands the record label signed over the year.

Sitting in a cooler were glass soda bottles and Richie lifted one, searching for a bottle opener only to come up empty. Shrugging, he brought the bottle to his mouth, hoping to open it with his teeth the way he used to in college, but that proved futile. He was older and his teeth weren't as strong as they used to be.

"It's a twist-off," A voice from behind him said.

Richie turned and the bottle nearly slipped through his fingers as his eyes settled on the new person in the room.

It was him, his morning glory.

Dr. K.

He looked exactly like Richie hoped he would. Utterly gorgeous.

He wasn't dolled up in eyeliner or hair gel the way he would if he

was on stage or dressed in the best designers for a photoshoot, but he still looked too good to be true. Dark jeans with a dark jacket, a Ramones tee shirt hugging his toned body. His skin was pale, showing off every mark and freckle he had to offer.

His hair was shorter now; another shock vibing out through the music world. First Trashmouth loses their lead and then the lead loses his hair. Richie didn't mind it though. The shorter cut framed Dr. K's face ever so perfectly.

He was absolutely gorgeous and Richie felt like he was a six-foot tall garbage can on fire just standing in the same room with him.

Richie watched as Dr. K came forward, going to grab a bottle out of the cooler. He twisted it open with ease, offering it to Richie to switch out with the unopened one he was holding. Richie took it, still not saying a word as he watched the other man open a second bottle for himself and begin to drink it.

"What? Disappointed it's not beer?" Dr. K asked him curiously.

"It's ten in the morning," Richie mentioned.

Dr. K shrugged off, sipping slowly at his drink. "As they say: it's five o'clock somewhere." He mentioned, taking another swig of the soda bottle. "So. You're him, huh?" He asked, looking him up and down slowly.

A tickle of nerves ran along Richie's back and after nearly spitting out his sip, he placed the bottle down beside him. "Yes. Hi. Richard Tozier; representative of Paper Boat magazine." He stuck his hand out, offering a shake.

He wanted to be professional, but he wondered if that came off lame. Lame was the last thing he wanted because anything that wasn't punk or rock and roll was incredibly lame.

And Richie was very sure if he looked lame in front of Dr. K he would throw himself in front of a moving train.

Luckily for him, Dr. K didn't seem to mind. He offered a polite smile and reached out to shake his hand. His shake was tight and simple, though Dr. K did linger a bit longer than expected.

"So, shall the interview begin?" He offered, gesturing over to the couch across the way.

Richie scrambled to take his seat, wanting to make room for everything that was begging to come out of his mouth.

"First I just want to say thank you for allowing us to do this. I know you aren't a very public person so to be able to do a one on one with you is truly an honor."

"People are hungry. Might as well feed them." Dr. K replied slowly.

“Right. Okay. So a solo album. Why now?”

“Why not now?”

“Right, okay. Great answer.” Richie clicked his pen and began writing that down. “So the album. Do you have a title for it yet?”

“We have a few things bouncing around but nothing has been decided yet.”

“And it’s all original work that you’ve written on your own?”

“Oh, the contrary; my first big solo album will be a complete list of some of my favorite songs already in creation.”

Richie pauses, looking up. “So a cover album?” He questioned, pushing his glasses up. “Why? I only ask because you’re an amazing songwriter! Surely you can make a whole album up on your own.”

“Your flattery is charming. And I have many ideas for songs but there are already so many songs out there and I want to lend my own voice and specific style to them.” Dr. K paused, smiling then. “And don’t call me Shirley.”

“Dr. K gets off with a zinger! Impressive.” Richie scribbled everything

down, leaning back in the chair as he grew more comfortable. “Okay so. Cover album. Do I get to know any of the songs?”

“It will be between fifteen and twenty. We’re still narrowing it down.”

“That’s quite a lot. Any particular reason?”

“I’m greedy.” Dr. K shrugged, sipping slowly at his bottle.

Richie focused his eyes on the pad in his hands instead of on the bottle that Dr. K had his mouth wrapped around.

“I will say each song has been chosen by me personally. Little ditties that touched me in one way or another during my life; going all the way back to my childhood to now.”

“Do you have a favorite?”

“I do, though I can’t say without revealing anything.”

“What about in general?” Richie inquires. “Come on. Even a rockstar has to have a favorite song.”

Eddie smiled softly, almost dismissively. Richie thought he was going

to ignore the question or request a skip, but instead, Richie would himself getting the answer.

“ Clock strikes upon the hour and the sun begins to fade. Still enough time to figure out how to chase my blues away. I've done alright up to now, it's the light of day that shows me how. And when the night falls, loneliness calls.... ”

Richie blinked, his mind desperately trying to get past the fact that Dr. K just sang to him to recognize the song.

“I Wanna Dance With Somebody?” He asked aloud, his eyes squinting behind his glasses. “Your favorite song is by Whitney Houston?”

“Are you not a fan?”

“What? No, it’s not that! Whitney was iconic. Rest In Peace Queen, but I just meant. It’s surprising! Especially for somebody with your record.”

“Even rockstars can have a soft spot for a good pop song,” Eddie told him with a small smile.

Richie, having found himself staring, scrambling to write everything down. He paused, collecting his thoughts so he could wrap this up. He didn’t want to leave yet but he didn’t want to take up any more of Dr. K’s time.

“Why now?” He asked suddenly. “Why go solo now?”

“My bandmates have lives of their own. Wives. Children. I have neither. Besides, I lived my life doing what people expected of me. Thought I’d have fun and throw a wrench in their plan for me.”

A knock on the door came. After a few seconds, Beverly opened, sticking her fiery redhead inside. “K, I’m sorry to interrupt but Stanley is on the phone. Legal mumbo-jumbo.”

“Duty calls.” Dr. K sighed, standing slowly from the couch. Realizing the interview was over, Richie stood as well, shoving everything back into his bag. Dr. K didn’t move right away. He stood in front of Richie, that same damn smile across his lips.

“Thank you. Really. Having this chance had been a total career changer.” He mentioned to him, pausing just before they could separate.

Richie always took his job seriously but come on, how detailed could you get about something when the story you were writing was on giant chocolate chip cookies or watching celebs balance pies on their heads? This was the first legitimate of Richie’s career and he was incredibly grateful for the chance.

“Do you think I could bother you for a picture? I know it’s super unprofessional, but you’re like my idol.”

Dr. K laughed then. Not mockingly, but rather with surprise. There was a glimmer in his eyes Richie couldn't recognize, though he didn't get the chance to question it as Dr. K came to his side in moments.

Richie scrambled to grab his phone, holding it out so he could capture both of them. They smiled wide, standing beside one another closely as the picture was taken. Richie was definitely going to make that his lock screen the moment he got home.

He offered his hand, one final shake and Dr. K took it without question. "It was nice to see you again, Richie." He said, giving the hand one last squeeze before Beverly ushered him out.

Richie stood there, offering a lame wave as he was left alone in the room. A solid minute passed before Dr. K's words repeated in his head.

Nice to see you again? What the *fuck* ?

Notes for the Chapter:

So currently, my lock screen is of a manip of Richie saying "Eat Ass, Suck Dick, and Sell Drugs." Tell us yours! Also, please tell us what you think below. We thrive on attention.

3. Kill My Mind - Louis Tomlinson

*You kill my mind
Raise my body back to life
And I don't know what I'd do without you now*

*Kept me living
From the last time
From a prison of a past life
On a mission just to feel like
When you kissed me for the last time*

While he may not have been the most studious of those who worked at Paper Boat magazine, Richie was anything if not professional. He stayed up throughout the night as he pieced together the interview to send to Bill. He wanted to ace that job, mind you. Even if he just did fluff pieces and bullshit reports, he always made sure his work was coherent and easy to read.

When the following day came, he made his way back into the studio, clutching a large coffee with a double shot, recalling what the singer said again and again.

What the fuck did he mean by it was nice to see you again?

He thought about all the people he had met throughout the years in the industry and nope. Dr. K wasn't on that list. He had been a fan of Trashmouth since he was a junior in college, there is no fucking way he would have forgotten meeting him even if it was early on in his career.

As he made his way to his cubby, he stumbled into Georgie, who was adjusting his camera and making his way down to the designated photoshoot area.

“Jesus, you look terrible. What happened to you?” Was the first thing he asked him.

“Thanks for the support, little man. I appreciate it,” he commented with a chuckle. “I had to edit the interview and it took longer than expected.” He admitted sipping at his coffee, trying to make it seem casual.

He also stayed awake, examining the selfie he had taken moments before the bombshell. He had seen Dr. K’s face nearly every day for the past eight years. Richie was very sure if they had met before, he would have recognized him.

You don’t just forget about meeting a fucking rockstar even if you met them before their star status.

“Oh, right,” the guy nodded, going back to set his camera. “He’ll be here in five. The singer guy. His assistant just called me,” he informed.

Sometimes he forgot that Georgie was nearly ten years younger than Bill. Still in college with a lush career on his shoulders all thanks to his brother’s connections. He would be jealous of the little fucker if he wasn’t such a damn sweetheart.

“Cool. Cool cool.”

“You can come along if you want. No one is allowed access other than me and Bill, but since you’re doing the expose on him, I don’t see why you shouldn’t be there too.”

“Oh. Right. Thanks.”

And he was panicking again. He really shouldn’t be because like Georgie said, he was just a singer guy. Except he wasn’t. He was Dr. K. Lead -- former -- lead singer of Trashmouth. A band that meant more to Richie than he is proud to admit at this very moment.

As they made their way down to the secluded area, Richie’s mouth started watering. Was that normal? He’d have to check with a doctor. A real one. True to words, Dr. K and Beverly arrived a few minutes later with Bill in tow. Georgie greeted them kindly, while Richie just stood off awkwardly to the side, staring out at him like a psycho as Georgie explained what they wanted him to do.

It wasn’t going to be anything wild. Richie had seen other promotional photos of the man and while some of them helped him get through some very lonely nights, this wasn’t going to be like that. They weren’t giving him stupid props or greasing him up.

He would wear the clothes he came in with (black jeans and a black and white checkered button-down), and Bill would talk to him throughout it just to keep him confident and relaxed. It was pretty

standard with Paper Boat. They wanted real people so having a photoshoot that was more photoshopped than anything wasn't their cup of tea.

Giving Georgie a minute to set up, Richie watched as Dr. K approached him, that particular smile sitting so comfortably across his lips. It only made Richie more nervous.

"Hey Richie," He greeted him casually.

"Hey! Hi. Good morning," He rambled out, his hand still clutching his coffee. "Excited for the shoot?"

"Nothing new to me to be honest, though I do appreciate your boss not lathering me up in lube." He admitted with a small shrug.

"That was a great shoot. I mean, I doubt it was comfortable and it had to be a bitch to wash off, but ten out of ten stars for me." He mentioned, rolling on the balls of his feet. He was teetering. Waiting. Waiting for what though? If he didn't spit it out he would miss his chance and then the mystery would only continue. "Hey, can I ask you something real quick?"

"Shoot."

"Yesterday, at the interview before you left, remember? You- you said it was nice to see me again," he started, pausing as Beverly came over, passing Dr. K his own cup of coffee.

Richie took a slow sip of his mouth, hoping to quench his throat that was suddenly very dry.

Dr. K thanked her, sipping at his cup as Beverly left them again. "Mhm, I remember."

"Well, I've been thinking about it and honestly dude, I don't remember ever meeting you." He finally confessed. "Did we like, have a class together in school? I highly doubt it because you were touring while I was getting my bachelor's, but I really can't find you anywhere in my mind. And trust me, I would remember someone like you. Cute, and sexy, and talented. You're like a triple threat and I have like, seven shirts with your face on it, plus multiple pictures of you in my apartment, and I've seen you perform sixteen times in the past eight years, and I should stop talking now because Bill is literally right there and told me I shouldn't embarrass myself and me—"

Dr. K started laughing then, soft and sweet. His smile only grew and those dark eyes shimmered almost lovingly. "Beep beep, Richie."

And after that he was whisked away by Georgie. They didn't apply much makeup other than some powder to help with the shine. Richie was left standing like a fool, watching as Dr. K was placed where they wanted him and Bill began talking to him as the photoshoot began.

"Beep beep?" Richie muttered aloud, trying to remember where he heard that before.

Until it clicked.

“Beep beep, Richie!”

Richie laughed aloud, turning back to make sure the other boy was still behind him. It was summer and they were kids, which meant they were going to do whatever the hell they wanted to do without a single care in the world. Their town was small and boring, so what else were two ten year old kids supposed to do? Sit at home and watch cartoons?

They rode their bikes around town, finally making it to the standpipe where they could have a bit of privacy. They went there more often than not, as it was the only place in the whole damn town that wasn't a waste of space.

They hurried inside, just as they had so many times before. As children, preteens, and then finally teenages. Sure, two ten year olds running a muck was pretty annoying, but it was the thirteen year olds that caused the most trouble, with their potty mouths and terrible ideas.

Richie lead the other boy inside, sneaking through the rickety door and up, up, up the stairs until they reached the very top. It was the only place high enough where you could see beyond Derry. See the horizon as the sun set down and actually know there was more of this world than just their shitty town.

“All right, Rapunzel! I've brought you back to your tower, far away from that terrible, terrible witch that kept you captive!”

"That's not even how the story goes, dumbass." The other boy laughed.

His words were meant to be cruel, but they weren't. And his gaze wasn't one of disdain but appreciation. Richie adjusted his glasses, moving closer to the other boy. "Either way, I'm still the prince charming, here to save the beautiful prince."

The other boy rolled his eyes fondly.

"If your mom puts you under a sleeping spell, I'll have to be the one to kiss you awake." Richie announced.

"Wrong princess, Richie."

"You do look rather sleepy, Eds. Maybe I should try it now? Just for practice?"

"Beep beep, Richie." The other boy replied, pulling the taller boy in to kiss him softly.

Richie hurried out of the studio, going up the stairs and out onto the street to gather from fresh air. He felt a tightness in his stomach that he hadn't dealt with in a very long time. He was sweaty and jumpy as people moved along the street beside him. It was as if he had seen a ghost and in some ways, he had.

There was only one person in his life who said those words to him;

the mocking clown nose sound that would be used to sensor him or shut him up.

It was him. After all these years. After all the nightmares. After all the therapy sessions he finally walked back into his life.

Eddie Kaspbrak.

They had been friends since kindergarten. Best friends almost right off the bat. Eddie was a shy kid who didn't do well with crowds and Richie was a class clown who was shunned from all other cliques due to how obnoxious he was even from an early age.

They were two people who didn't belong in the small town they were trapped inside. Two boys who shared common interests and scars, and more importantly, secrets.

Eddie Kaspbrak was the reason Richie turned into such a basket case, so afraid to come out of his shell and be proud of who he was.

And it was Dr. K that helped Richie step out of the darkness and into the light.

Now it appeared they were one in the same.

There was no other way around it. Nobody else had ever said such a thing to him. "Beep beep" had been their thing, the thing Eddie

would say to get him to stop talking back when they were just kids. There was no possible way anybody else would know that.

After finally realizing he wasn't happy with the life had been living Richie went to therapy where he basically cried out every sad story he had to tell. In the end the therapist suggested he reach out to his old pal. Richie looked him up on every social media account he could but there was no sign of him anywhere.

It was like he didn't exist anymore.

In the back of his mind Richie thought the worst and he had good reason to. Things didn't end well for them back when they were kids. They were torn apart due to the prejudices of society and the pure hatred from Eddie's mother. He always wondered what happened to his friend, especially since it was very clear that he and Eddie were more than friends.

There was a time when he used to think they were fucking soulmates. It was silly to think and he was just thirteen when those thoughts popped into his head into his head but back then he didn't care.

It was just him and Eddie against the world. But the world ended up winning in the end.

Richie left the studio then, unsure of how he was supposed to carry on with the rest of the day with the knowledge he now had. He had practically gotten sick of it, thinking back to his childhood and how terrible things had turned out for himself.

He felt sick, like every time he got nervous about something. He felt sick and scared and happy? All of a sudden. Yes, he went to therapy because he thought his best friend was gone for good. Shit, he even called to as many conversion camps he could find information about across the country. Really, Sonia Kaspbrak would do anything to keep her son for herself.

And now Eddie was back in his life. How could he not see it? He went to sixteen concerts, got a poster of the band in his house, he even got cold showers courtesy of Dr. K. It was going to be a whole lot to process it. Process, first of all, that Eddie was alive. Two, that he was in his life again and even remembered him. And three, that he was Dr. K.

What. The. Fuck.

Richie went home hoping to collect his thoughts though it didn't turn out the way he hoped. He was going absolutely bonkers trying to control all these new revelations that were coming his way.

He tried to get his mind off it; even jumping into the shower hoping the warm water would make him feel like a normal person again but that was all for nothing.

He had to talk to Eddie. Obviously he remembered him. Remembered the things they used to say to one another. He felt like he was going out of his mind.

Looking at the clock, he swore sharply. He would be gone from the studio by now. Richie was mentally kicking himself for running away but it's what he did best.

There had to be another way. He was desperate but he didn't want to give up that easily.

So he called Bill, hoping to use his small amount of improv and acting skills to get him in good. "Bill! Buddy! Shit man you're never gonna believe this." He spoke drastically.

He told Bill this wild story about how he was watching a documentary on Galaxy Quest that got him excited, resulting in him knocking over his coffee cup onto his computer, which short-circuited as he was editing the interview.

"I got it back up and rolling but I wasn't able to save. Yeah, it's gone man. All of it. I was hoping you had the number of his assistant so I could reschedule another one on one."

"You gotta be more careful, Rich. MacBooks aren't cheap." Bill replied with a laugh.

He texted him the number of Dr. K's personal assistant.

Easy as that.

Richie was ready to relay the whole story back to Beverly and when he did he thought that maybe it would be just as easy. Of course, it wasn't.

"Mr. Denbrough asked enough questions during the photoshoot to qualify as an interview. Surely that shall suffice, Mr. Tozier." She spoke coolly.

"It could but it wouldn't answer the hard-hitting questions that our readers want to know about," Richie replied. "Look it will only be a few minutes. I'll even come to him if you give me the address."

"I very well can't just give you the address of Dr. K's home." Beverly laughed off dismissively.

"Bev — can I call you Bev? — I need you to work with me here. I know I sound desperate and pathetic but I want you to know from the bottom of my heart, I am both."

He wasn't going to sugar coat it. He ran away because he was a weak bitch but he had to talk to Eddie about this. Needed him to fill in the gaps of their lives.

"Ten minutes, that's all. I don't want to waste his time, I just want to talk to him. You can even supervise if you're worried I'm gonna jump him or anything."

"You don't give up easily, do you, Tozier?"

“Actually I’ve been known to give up very easily. It’s just different this time around,” Richie confessed.

The line was quiet for a moment; too quiet that Richie thought that maybe the call dropped. He pulled away to look but found Beverly continuing.

“He’s not at his current home. He’s staying at the Waldorf Suites until further notice.” She explained.

He told her the name that he was staying under and explained he would be there for the rest of the night. Richie looked down at the paper, his heart jumping in his throat when he saw the name he was currently listed under “Spaghetti” which just hit too close to him.

“Don’t do anything stupid, Mr. Tozier.” She warned lightly.

“I make zero promises, Ms. Ringwald.” He said before ending the call.

He jumped up from his seat then, rushing off to change back into his clothing so he could hit the road and get some answers.

Notes for the Chapter:

The truth is slowly being revealed. What do you think so far? Please tell us down below. We live for validation and aren't ashamed to say so.

4. Angels - Robbie Williams

*I sit and wait
Does an angel contemplate my fate
And do they know
The places where we go
When we're grey and old
'Cause I have been told
That salvation lets their wings unfold
So when I'm lying in my bed
Thoughts running through my head
And I feel the love is dead
I'm loving angels instead*

Richie felt like he was running a mile a minute, even when he was behind the wheel of a car. His throat was tight and his head felt it had been pound against concrete. He rubbed his eyes behind his glasses, trying to collect himself as he sat in the parking lot of the hotel. He couldn't go in there looking like a deranged lunatic.

He had his badge from Paper Boat and made sure to dress appropriately before heading to the hotel. He didn't want them to think he was some kind of crazed fan who had a weapon on him. And yeah, maybe he was partially a crazed fan, but he wasn't carrying any weapon. When he went to the front desk, asking for the room number, he showed everything he had to. After checking with Dr. K's assistant (Beverly, of course) he was given access and lead up to the suite.

He knocked on the door, practically holding his breath as he waited. And waited, and waited, and waited. And for a hot second, he thought maybe he wasn't even there. He was a fucking rockstar for God's sake, who fucking knew what he was doing with his time!

And then the door opened and Dr. K was standing there, looking as gorgeous as ever. He didn't seem all too surprised to see Richie there, but he also didn't look like he was expecting him either. "Richie. Hi."

"Hey." He breathed softly.

"What's up?" Dr. K asked with a soft smile. And there it was... a glimpse of the old Eddie he used to love. Used to? Or still loved? Did love ever truly die or was humanity just too soft?

"Oh. I was just . . . in the neighborhood." Richie said, rolling on the balls of his feet, setting aside the rambling in his head. "Do you mind if I come in?"

Dr. K stood there for another moment before stepping aside. The moment he was allowed access, Richie rushed right in, his fingers combing through his hair slowly. "I lied," he said as soon as the door was closed behind him. "I wasn't in the neighborhood."

"I sort of guessed that Rich," the other said with a slight chuckle as he walked up to him.

"I came here because you're . . . you."

"I'm me." Dr. K breathed out with a shrug.

“You’re . . . shit, man.” Richie began pacing back and forth, breathing deeply.

He had thought about it over and over again in the car. All the things he wanted to say to the other man. All the emotions that he had pent up and buried deep inside since they were just kids. And now it was his chance to spit it all out, but he just couldn’t.

He didn’t look like Eddie. Eddie was short and wore bobby socks and short-shorts with a rainbow pattern. A polo shirt and bleached white shoes and always carrying around an inhaler. The little boy with the perfectly cut hair and adorable dimples. That was the Eddie he knew. The Eddie he loved.

This man wasn’t that kid anymore. He was in jeans and a black shirt. Muscles that could be seen through the shirt and combed back hair. He had tattoos and bags under his eyes.

Though that smile. That stupid fucking smile was the same. Richie knew it from the moment he saw it in person.

That beautiful, boyish smile. After a decade and a half that still hasn’t changed.

“I thought you were dead!” Richie snapped after a moment, turning to face the other man. “I thought . . . you just fucking disappeared, man. You were there and then you weren’t and I never heard from you again.”

“I said goodbye,” Dr. K mentioned somberly.

But it wasn't supposed to be their goodbye. Eddie had snuck out one final time before his mother moved them away. They were just thirteen but so much shit happened between them. They were kids who were forced to grow up due to the hate that society wore as a badge of honor.

Richie thought about that night often, dreaming of it until it slowly began to haunt him like a nightmare it was. Living with the knowledge that he'd never see this one person again. Eddie was the only person who made Richie feel like he was worth something and then he was gone in a flash and all he had left were the memories he wished he could forget.

“I tried to find you, but nothing came up,” Richie confessed to him. “Eddie Kaspbrak didn't exist anymore.”

“He doesn't. Not really. I don't have personal social media or any of that shit. Beverly keeps all my personal information under lock and key.”

“This is . . . I feel like I'm in the Twilight Zone, man.”

“I know this isn't ideal Rich, but I'm glad you know.” Dr. K -- Eddie, he was Eddie -- admitted. “The moment I found out that you'd be the one interviewing me. Rich, I thought I was losing my mind.”

“*You’re losing your mind?*” Richie laughed aloud. “I’ve seen you over a dozen times in concert! I have shirts with your face on them. I’ve fucking jacked off to you dude, and now I’m finding out you’re my fucking childhood sweetheart or some shit.”

“Why are you mad about this?”

“I’m not mad!” Richie snapped. “I’m just . . . I’m not good with my emotions, okay?” He moved to plop down on the couch, hiding his face in his hands. “After you left, I had no one okay? It took a ridiculously long time for me to get around with being comfortable in my skin again. I tried to forget about that time, you know? I tried to move on, but it’s hard. And I thought I accomplished it, but now you’re back and all those memories and emotions are coming back.”

Richie didn’t know if he wanted to run away or vomit. Maybe a bit of both. He honestly had no clue, but what he did know was that he needed to focus on something other than the harsh reality, mostly because it wasn’t all that harsh, to begin with.

For years he had hoped and prayed that he’d see Eddie again and know that the other guy was all right. That his mother didn’t hurt him or send him somewhere that killed his beautiful spirit. Richie didn’t know how Eddie went from being the sweet little kid with the inhaler in his fanny pack to the punk rock God that was Dr. K but he was sure the transition was interesting enough.

Eddie was beside him suddenly, a hand placed on his shoulder as they sat together on the couch. “I missed you, Rich.” He admitted quietly.

“Fuck, Eddie.”

He was Eddie. He could call him that now. He could look to this guy and not only see this amazing rock star but also his childhood best friend all grown up. They were both all grown up and that scared Richie more than anything.

“I have like . . . nine hundred questions.” He admitted with a soft laugh.

Eddie smiled in response, giving his shoulder a gentle squeeze. “Well, I’m free for the rest of the night, so if you want to ask, lay them on me.”

Richie didn’t know where to start so he just started babbling out questions at lightning speed. What the fuck happened to him after he moved away? How did he survive his mother’s intolerance? How did he join Trashmouth? Fucking *Trashmouth* !

“I can’t believe my favorite band is named after me,” Richie mentioned quietly. “That’s like, a total mind fuck dude.”

“The label was putting it all together and needed something extremely alternative,” Eddie admitted, leaning back on the opposite side of the couch.

They were sitting together, face to face the same way they would on the old hammock in Richie's backyard. Legs tangled, feet near the face.

"Trashmouth sounded so ridiculous and they ended up loving it."

"I feel like I deserve some revenue or something." Richie teased. "All right. One name down. Now I have to know the other. Dr. K?"

"You're the one who gave it to me," Edde mentioned fondly. "Every time you'd wipe out on your bike or do something to get yourself hurt, I'd bust my ass to get you fixed up."

"Dude, I was making a Kevorkian joke," Richie admitted, laughing as he thought back to all the teasing he had done to the poor kid until their true feelings came out.

Of course, even when they were technically an item and disgustingly in love despite only being twelve and thirteen, they still teased one another. It's just how they were. That was their thing and it worked wonderfully for them.

"Yeah well. Some people say I kill on stage, so it works."

"I'll drink to that," Richie said, raising the tiny water bottle they had taken from the minibar and sipping at it. As it turned out, Eddie wasn't a hard drinker. He had gotten over that part of his life it seemed. He confessed to Richie that he dabbled in the rock star

lifestyle a little too hard in the beginning and gave it all up so he wouldn't join the 27-Club.

Too many nights snorting things he shouldn't be snorting and waking up in a bed with someone whose name he never learned left Eddie slightly scarred and he wanted nothing more to do than to grow from those experiences and be better.

There were still so many things that he wanted to ask him, so many answers that he wanted, but he knew they couldn't go over it all at this moment. He tried to keep it slow, not wanting to bombard Eddie the first time they got to do this.

Eddie was moving then, suddenly sitting up so he was in the middle of the couch, resting in the entanglement of their limbs. "Did you see me sixteen times?" He inquired.

"On the third time I had the chance to go backstage, but I dipped last minute due to my nerves," Richie admitted, quietly wishing he had something harder to drink.

"Seriously? God, if we had . . . Rich, we could have reconnected so much earlier."

"Trust me, you did not want to know college-Richie, okay? My hair was greasy, and my face was all sorts of fucked up. I was in the closet and I desperately needed to be held."

“Rich. I think you’re forgetting that I used to swap spit with eighth-grade-Richie, who sounds identical to college-Richie.”

“I can’t believe you said swap-spit without cringing. Where did my little hypochondriac go?”

“I think he died of a cocaine overdose a few years back,” Eddie joked dryly, going to lay back on the couch.

“So that’s really what rock and rollers do? Do drugs, sleep around, and drink until you can’t remember your name?”

“Something like that,” Eddie drawled out. “When they put the band together I wasn’t in a good place. I was good and I knew that. People told me that constantly. People said I was talented and put little white lines in front of me and offered me girls and when I said I didn’t want girls they offered me, guys. Some people were put off with the idea of a gay rockstar but others thought it would be a new wave or inventive. Woke or whatever.”

“Will you tell me about it? How it all began?”

“What are you doing tomorrow?”

Richie raised a brow, taken aback by the question. “Wait you wanna see me again?” He asked dumbly.

“Hell yeah, I wanna see you! We have seventeen years to catch up on, asshole. I wanna know what else you’ve been doing up to this point.”

Richie snorted, really, really wishing he was drinking something stronger. “I can assure you, it won’t be half as interesting as everything you’ve been doing.”

“Let me be the judge of that.”

Eddie had something to do the following morning but he’d be free the afternoon. Richie had already told Bill that he wanted to work in the article so he’d use that excuse to not show up to the office.

It was strange, making plans like these. With a friend. With Eddie. Eddie was his friend. Not a best friend like he had been years ago, but it was still something.

Richie left the suite wondering what in the hell just happened. After years of wondering and searching, he finally found that long lost best friend and there was barely an ounce of awkwardness to it.

Okay, maybe an ounce only because it was still so hard to see him as Eddie and not Dr. K. Richie was eager to know how he got from point A to B but he’d wait for that.

If Eddie stayed in his life then he’d wait forever.

5. Still Into You - Paramore

*I should be over all the butterflies but I'm into you, I'm into you
And even baby our worst nights
I'm into you, I'm into you
Let 'em wonder how we got this far,
'Cause I don't really need to wonder at all
Yeah, after all this time
I'm still into you*

Richie went back home with more than half of his questions unasked but full of hope. Hope that Eddie wanted to see him again. Hope that Eddie wanted to answer his questions. It felt weird, but good, to have him back.

Fuck, his therapist would surely have a stroke right now if he knew that the progress they had made went right down the drain. Oh fuck it, he paid him big time so he could do with what he learned whatever he liked.

And what did he do to distract himself from Eddie? Well, edit Dr. K's interview all night. It was still weird, not separating Dr. K from Eddie. They were so different but at the same time, he couldn't deny it. Under the eyeliner and dark clothes, there was still that guy with a soft smile he thought he would never see again. The boy that haunted his dreams night after night.

Fuck.

He was spiraling down again, wasn't he? Maybe he needed to call his therapist and book an appointment after all these years. First thing in

the morning.

He fell asleep around four on top of his computer, without even realizing it, so when he heard the doorbell rang, he was surprised he wasn't in his bed. Confused and still half asleep, he went to answer. Whoever it was, he was going to have to bear with his bad breath, messy hair and pajamas, which consisted of a pair pickle rick pajama bottoms -yes, he was a thirty-year-old man, thank you- and an old Trashmouth shirt, his first one (and he was proud that it still fits.) Thank god Eddie wasn't there to see that.

But Richie's life was a mess and he left his luck forgotten in his mother's womb, so when he opened the door, there he was, dressed as simply as the day before, but with a cap and glasses on, Eddie, a.k.a. Dr. K, in all his glory.

"I was in the neighborhood." The man said with a smirk, lowering his glasses down to squint at the wrinkled shirt Richie was wearing. "Is that mine?"

"What? No, it's mine." Richie told him outright.

"I meant my band, dumbass." Eddie chuckled.

Richie had halfway forgotten he was even wearing the thing, mostly because he had so many graphic tees and band shirts that they all got mixed up whenever he'd pull something on to sleep in. He shook his head, rubbing his eyes with the heel of his hand. "What's up, dude?" He asked, his voice heavy as he tried to come off as casual as possible.

“Told you. I was in the neighborhood.” Eddie mentioned with a shrug. “Mind if I come in?”

Richie always imagined this sort of thing. Well, kind of. He didn’t expect a rockstar to just show up on his doorstep. If anything, they’d meet at a stage door or a bar and he’d go back to the millionaires home, but instead, he was here. Wanting to come into his shitty apartment. It felt like something that came right out of a fanfic site.

Except this wasn’t just some rockstar. This was fucking Eddie.

Eddie who used to babble on and on about how dirty Richie’s carpet was, and how he never made his bed, and always left his clothes on the floor. And honestly, it was the same shit except Richie had hardwood floors that could honestly use a polishing.

Regardless though, it wasn’t like Richie could tell him no.

So he stepped aside and allowed him to enter his apartment, wishing he had been given a heads up so he could have gotten dressed and clean up. However, Richie didn’t always get what he wanted in life. If he did, he wouldn’t be the miserable bastard he was today.

Eddie entered the home, looking around casually before turning back to Richie, finally removing the cap and sunglasses.

“If you wanted to blend in, you should have worn the polo and track shorts. Could have looked like every other dad in Whole Foods.” Richie mentioned to him, going to lean against the island, once again hoping to pull off the casual look.

“You shop at Whole Foods?” Eddie asked with a raised brow.

Richie didn’t reply. He shopped. Sometimes. Mostly ate out, because he could afford it, and anything he had at home was microwavable. And there was nothing wrong with that, at least to him.

“So um, what’s with the haircut?” He asked instead.

Eddie laughed shortly, caught off guard. “What?”

“You cut your hair. You used to have like, all the flowy locks and shit,” Richie gestured to his hair, which wasn’t that long or flowy but was a lot longer Eddie’s newest hair cut. It was similar to what he used to wear when they were kids, back when Eddie’s mom was in charge of how he wore his style.

“Oh. Just wanted something different.” He admitted. “New album. New me, right?” Eddie paused, raising a brow to Richie. “Is it bad?”

“What? No! No, no.” Richie shook his head quickly. “It looks great! Amazing, honestly. I mean, you went from looking like a seventies twink to like, a modern twunk.”

“What the actual fuck is a twunk?”

“A twinky hunk. Or hunky twink. You’re small but strong. Like . . . a bossy bottom.”

“Did you just call me a bottom?” Eddie asked, sounding more amused than offended.

“Are you? Wait, are you...are you still into...you know.”

“Richie, I write songs about fucking men, are you seriously asking me if I’m still gay?”

Richie paused, shifting from one leg to the other. He rubbed his hands together nervously, unable to what to say. He didn’t want to put his foot in his mouth or anything else. “I mean. I don’t know. Still trying to find out the difference between Dr. K and Edward Kaspbrak.”

“I think I’m trying to find out the differences too,” Eddie admitted somberly, going to lean across from Richie. “But, for a starter, whether it’s Eddie or Dr. K. We’re both gay. You of all people should know that.”

“Kids do stupid things when they’re, well, kids.” Richie shrugged.

“Hiding inside the standpipe was stupid,” Eddie told him carefully. “Going down to the quarry or jumping off the edge into that disgusting water was stupid. What we did wasn’t stupid, Rich.”

Richie didn’t know if he wanted to talk about it. They should. They had to. How could they not? They went from strangers to friends, to best friends, to boyfriends, and then to strangers again so quickly that even after all these years Richie was still dealing with the whiplash.

They didn’t do anything more than a kiss. Fuck, they didn’t even fully makeout. They were fucking thirteen years old. The first time Richie even talked about touching his dick, Eddie called him gross and made him double wash his hands before hanging out.

They were young, but they knew what they wanted and they knew the world wouldn’t fully understand them. They were alone together in this big, dark, scary place, but that was fine. Richie was okay because he knew he wasn’t suffering in silence. He had Eddie and Eddie had him.

And then they have pulled apart and Richie didn’t know how to cope. He had to pay hundreds upon hundreds of dollars for a therapist just to be able to say ‘I’m gay’ out loud.

And now here he was, talking about the sexuality of his favorite rockstar, with his favorite rockstar, who also happens to be or at least was, his favorite person too.

What a clusterfuck. People should write a book about it. Maybe make it a soap opera.

“What about you?” Eddie asked with a raised brow. “Did you switch sides in the past few years?”

“I met a girl at one of your concerts and threw up on her when she touched my dick,” Richie admitted in a blunt ramble. “Safe to say, I’m into dudes.”

It wasn’t the worst night of his life. Close, but he’d give that to any time in High school, but overall, the night he attempted to hook up with a girl wasn’t the most shining moment in Richie’s existence. He already knew that he enjoyed guys, but he thought if he could convince himself that he also liked girls that he’d be okay. That he could get away with not having to pretend.

College-Richie wasn’t the brightest, all right?

He drank and got turned on by watching the lead singer of this new punk rock band and let some girl flirt with him. They made their way into the bathroom and made out, which wasn’t terrible despite the stickiness of her lip gloss and the sweet smell of her perfume giving him a headache.

Her breasts were soft and that was pretty off-putting, but he ignored it cause his dick was hard. And then she pushed her skinny fingers into his jeans and wrapped them around his dick and suddenly Richie turned into Linda Blair all over her.

She wasn’t horrible about it. Like, she didn’t scream or anything. She

just walked away from him and that was fine. It was better that way.

Richie went back to his dorm and screamed into his pillow, falling asleep to the first Trashmouth album.

“Oh buddy,” Eddie whispered. The way that you’d say when you realize how pathetic something is, but you don’t want to make the person feel even worse about themselves.

“It’s fine,” Richie said, squinting his eyes shut. He hadn’t grabbed his glasses and the world was just a bit fuzzy. “I’m fine now. Gay as a three dollar bill and all that shit.”

“I think it’s ‘queer as a three dollar bill.’” Eddie mentioned to him.

“Regardless, it’s what I am. In and out of Maine.”

“I won’t tour there,” Eddie said suddenly. “Wasn’t exactly ideal. The label tried to make me go but I refused to go on. I guess I got a rep for being a diva or whatever, but I won’t go back to that place.”

“You never told me how you go out,” Richie mentioned.

“Right.” Eddie sighed. “I guess you’ve earned my tragic backstory.”

"I was there for it asshole. At least partly." He straightened and stretched, scratching at his five o'clock shadows. "Lemme get dressed. Get my glasses. We can talk."

"You should keep the shirt on. It looks good on you."

"Glad to know you still like being on top of me, Eds." Richie fired back, making his way into his bedroom.

He returned not long after; actual clothes on this time around. Jeans and a plain tee shirt. Nothing fancy or anything with Eddie's face on it. He had his glasses on this time around, though he partially wished he didn't.

When he walked back out, Eddie was standing in the corner, looking at the shrine that Richie had made to all the celebrities that had changed his life. Dr. K, of course, was at the forefront and now he was here, staring at it.

"Oh fuck."

"It's nice," Eddie told him, his eyes remaining on the picture. "I'm honored."

"Listen. Lemme just get this out right now. I went through some dark shit and your music, I don't know if it's just you or the whole band, but it helped me a lot, okay?" Richie rushed to explain; he just wanted Eddie to stay and not run out scared that he was just another

crazed fan who wanted to keep a lock of his hair in a book or something.

“You don’t have to explain anything, Rich.” Eddie interrupted him carefully. “It’s . . . well, the band is good. They’re great guys, but I did the writing. I . . . I ended up becoming a star by accident, I guess.” Eddie admitted, moving deeper into the room and going to sit on the couch. “I was at school and took up music as an elective. I took up the guitar because it always seemed interesting. A buddy of mine had a band. I invited me to go and play with them for a while. After one show he got too drunk to go on and I ended up being the lead singer and guitarist. Some big wig for the music industry ended up being there. He likes my style and asked me to play with this group of guys who needed a singer and that’s that.”

“I always thought you had a nice voice,” Richie mentioned going to sit across from him, knees bent as he leaned against the arm of the couch. “Then again, singing along to Whitney in your bedroom and selling out Madison Square Garden isn’t the same thing.”

“This break up. It’s not a breakup, with Trashmouth.” Eddie admitted gently. “Those guys are like brothers to me. But they have wives and families and shit. We’ve been doing this for almost ten years nonstop. They’ve missed a lot. They wanna take a break and I respect that.”

“You don’t wanna take a break?”

Eddie shrugged easily. “I’m not married. I don’t have kids. Shit, I don’t even have a dog. I think if I took a break I might lose my mind with boredom.”

“You could get a dog,” Richie suggested.

“I’d love to but seeing as I am homeless at the moment.”

“ *Homeless!* ?” Richie spits out. “Dude, you’re worth millions, how the fuck are you homeless?”

“My place is being worked on. Being demolished. Hated the way it looked so I’m having it remade, though the contractor I am dealing with is a real dickhead.”

“Is that why you’re at the fancy-schmancy hotel?” Richie asked with a raised brow.

“Beverly’s place is too small and I still have a penthouse in New York, but we’re recording here in LA so it’s not like I can go back and forth.”

“We have a guy that we featured in the magazine a year ago that might be able to help you out. He’s an architect and we sort of put his name on the map so he owes us one. I could give him a call for you.”

“You don’t have to do that Rich,” Eddie waved him off.

“Well call it even after that time you stole that comic book from Keenes for me,” Richie mentioned, digging into his pocket for his cell

phone.

He texted Bill, requesting the number of Ben Hanscom as well as mentioning he needed an extension on the exposé on Dr. K, going to snap a pic of him on the couch to send to Bill as proof that he wasn't lazing off.

"You sure you don't want me to sign that for you?" Eddie asked with a playful smirk, gesturing to the picture of him on the wall.

"Of fuck off," Richie scoffed as he finished writing the text.

"You could sell it! Make good money out of it," Eddie suggested with a shrug.

"Okay, keep talking, Eds," Richie smirked. "But no. It was your first magazine spread and now it has a hell of a lot more value knowing it's you. My little Eddie Spaghetti."

Eddie groaned and threw his head back in fake frustration. "Jesus, I was enjoying living without those annoying nicknames of yours, Trashmouth."

"You know, every time I remember you named your band after me, I get reminded that you owe me royalties. How curious, huh?" Richie teased him with a slight smirk. "No, but really, I wouldn't sell it for anything."

“I’m glad you like it. The shoot was a nightmare. I didn’t know what to do with myself.” Eddie admitted with a shrug. “That was when I first got into the whole Dr. K persona and I was trying to work out the kinks of it all.”

“Oooh, Dr. K has kinks, huh? Sexy.”

Eddie hummed, saying no more. “I should probably get going.” He mentioned, at last, making a movement that seemed like he was forcing himself up.

Richie followed him to the door, going to lean against the frame after he opened it. “It’s so surreal, you know? Having you back here.”

He never imagined having Eddie back into his life, let alone having him in his life in the form of his idol.

“Well, I don’t plan on going anywhere,” Eddie told him, that boyish smile and the glimmer in his eyes doing wonderful things to Richie’s heart, stomach, and well, dick.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Richie mentioned, watching as Eddie pulled the baseball cap back onto his head and shoved the sunglasses back onto his face. Back to the disguise to keep him from the people on the street.

Richie didn't live in a super busy neighborhood, though it was better to be safe than sorry. Richie offered a lame wave as Eddie walked off, leaving him alone in his apartment again.

Notes for the Chapter:

Please make sure to subscribe so you don't miss any updates. There is a lot happening between these two! And please comment below and tell us what you thought. We thrive on attention!

Author's Note:

All the lights couldn't put out the dark
Runnin' through my heart
Lights up and they know who you are
Know who you are
Do you know who you are?